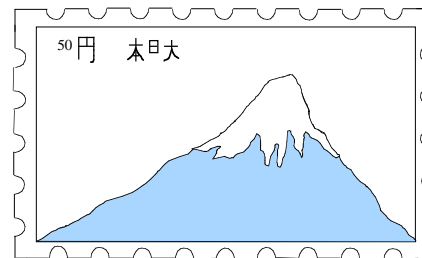


Konichiwa (that means ‘hello’ in Japanese) friends!

My name is Kazuo, and along with my cousin Saburo, we will be your personal advisors as you learn about Japan! Surely you have heard of the sushi, sumo wrestlers, and video games that come from our country. But there’s a whole other side to Japan that we’ll be exploring. Are any of you avid mountain climbers? I hope so, because we’ll be learning a lot about our great heights.



<http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/EarthObservatory/MtFuji.Japan.html>

First, use your imagination and picture yourself taking an actual trip to Japan. But before you say “sayonara” to your homes, keep in mind a few things. The first sight you’ll see as your plane descends into Japan will likely be tall, steep and rugged mountains. My cousin and I both live in Odawara, a coastal city of about 200,000 people. It’s about 50 km from the capital city of Tokyo and less than 32 km from Japan’s most famous mountain, Mount Fuji! Mount Fuji is the highest point in Japan (3,776 m or 12,389 ft) and is an active volcano! Since it is not far away, my family and I take regular trips to visit this sacred landmark. Am I ever scared that Mt. Fuji will erupt?

No; it hasn’t exploded since 1707 and there are no earthquakes or gas emissions indicating activity, so I don’t think there is much to worry about!

Mount Fuji is just one of 200 volcanoes in Japan, and one of 40 active volcanoes. Dormant volcanoes (ones that haven’t erupted for hundreds of years) often surround these active ones. My sister, Kayori, and I enjoy exploring and learning about volcanoes so much that we have been to all of Japan’s famous volcanoes. Last spring, we went to Mount Sakurajima. This mountain is on the island of Kyushu.

When you’ve had enough of our mountains on land, you can learn about our mountains underwater! The seafloor next to Japan is filled with jagged underwater mountain chains that are

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extremely steep. These underwater mountain ranges are located next to deep canyons called trenches. It's an awfully dangerous place, so think twice about scuba diving in these rough waters! The Japan Deep is a north-south trench in the Pacific Ocean that is 8,534 m deep – that's over 5 miles!

Japan records about 1500 earthquakes every year. Some of these are large quakes, some lead to volcanic activity, and others have been so large they have made the history books. In 1923, a huge 8.0 earthquake and the fire that followed killed about 143,000 people and destroyed over 300,000 buildings! In 1995, when I was a little kid, we had another large earthquake near Kobe that killed about 5,000 people. Earthquakes of this magnitude are able to make land rise and fall. The reason earthquakes are so damaging in our country is that we have a large population, and everyone lives near each other. In fact, Japan is roughly the size of California but has a population that is nearly 3.5 times larger!

As if the shaking on land isn't enough, Japan faces disaster from offshore. Seismic activity under the ocean creates huge sea waves (tsunami) that can rise to over 30 meters! These high waves can cause destruction and severe erosion when they hit the low-lying coastal areas. My hometown of Odarawa is one of the cities that must be on the lookout for these sea waves.

I hope the tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanoes aren't scaring you, because Japan has a lot to offer culturally – sushi, sumo wrestling, and Kabuki Theater (this is a kind of play where men must dress up as women). Maybe I'll send you a postcard from Japan. Most postcards from here have pictures of majestic mountains, rice paddies, and dense downtown areas of Japan's cities.

If you ever visit, I'm sure Saburo will give you a boat tour of the area around our hometown, and maybe you can all watch one of my baseball games. My high school team is going to the local championship game, and I'm the starting pitcher! I hope all this helped, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Your friend,
Kazuo Matsuyama
35°N 140°E



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